

NSC BRIEFING

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26 March 1957

FALL OF MOLLET GOVERNMENT THREATENED

- I. With a confidence vote in the French National Assembly expected on 23 March, Premier Mollet's prospects are dimmer than at any time since he took office in January 1956.
 - A. Mollet's minority government of Socialists, some Radicals and Social Republicans has never commanded more than some 200 seats of the 593 seats in the Assembly, but has survived largely because the right wing elements have been disinclined to attempt an alternative government.
 - B. Mollet has exploited this situation by using general policy debates and demanding frequent votes of confidence.
- II. The debate on overall government policy starting 14 March brought to the surface stronger opposition than had been expected in view of the boost to Mollet's domestic prestige given by the outcome of the UN debate on Algerian and by his own Washington visit.
 - A. Attacks have centered mainly on the government's economic policies.
 1. France's threatening financial crisis is estimated by experts to have been moved up some two or three months by the Suez crisis.
 2. The monetary reserves dropped more than \$750,000,000 in the past year.

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B. In the debate, effective attacks on the government's corrective measures were delivered by:

1. Former Radical premier Mendes-France
2. Former Radical premier Edgar Faure
3. Former Former premier (right wing Independent) Paul Reynaud.

C. Defense of the government's policy by Finance Minister Baudouin was unconvincing.

1. Baudouin's hint of new taxes further antagonized right wing elements.

III. The government also failed to gain the reception it expected for the lengthy review of Algerian accomplishments by Minister Resident Lacoste. Though the speech was evidently tailored to appeal to rightist views, it was generally unconvincing.

IV. In the expected March vote the key factor will be the 100 votes of the conservative Independent and Peasant bloc.

A. Its Secretary general Duchet told the American embassy on 21 March that these parties will not decide on their position until after Mallet's closing speech on 27 March.

B. He believed, however, that Mallet would not be able to be explicit enough on Algerian policy to rally complete conservative support, and foresees as many as 60 of his bloc either voting against the government or abstaining—either to which would be a serious blow.

V. Duchet admitted that the necessary groundwork for an alternative right center government had not yet been laid and that the right would prefer to overthrow Mallet on a specifically economic

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A. With 130 of the Assembly's seats held by the Communists and another 39 by the Foujadists, any successor government would require either the support or the tolerance of Mollet's 100-seat Socialist party.

VI. The self-confidence of Mollet's cabinet has been somewhat shaken by the current debate and he is reported reluctant to resort to his usual tactic of demanding a formal vote of confidence from the Assembly.

A. He is probably relying mainly on his own final presentation on 27 March to smooth things over, and on the unwillingness of the Assembly to provoke a crisis pending parliamentary action on Algeria, Suez, and the EURATOM and Common Market treaties.

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~~NOTE OVERNIGHT~~

NSC BRIEFING

UPDATE 28 March 1957

FALL OF MOLLET GOVERNMENT THREATENED

- I. Mollet's survival prospects in ~~present~~ confidence vote 28 March poorest to date.
 - A. Year-old government actually controls only 200 seats of Assembly's 596--has habitually pressured rightist deputies for support by calling confidence vote on general policy.
ON 27 MAR, MOLLET DID IT AGAIN, FOR THE 3RD TIME.
- II. Unexpectedly strong opposition has developed thusfar in course 14-27 March debate:
 - A. Effective opposition attacks--poor Gov't defense--on economic policies.
 - B. Ineffective Gov't presentation Algerian policy.
- III. 100 votes Independent and Peasant bloc key factor:
 - A. Party position uncertain till after Mollet's 27 March speech.
- IV. Deterrent to overthrow of government:
 - A. Right center not ready to form a new Gov't--would need Socialist party tolerance.
- V. Nonetheless, Mollet cabinet less confident than usual of outcome.

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